

Franklin University

FUSE (Franklin University Scholarly Exchange)

The International Institute for Innovative
Instruction Blog

International Institute for Innovative Instruction

10-17-2017

Looking Back, Looking Forward: Instructional Design Reflections

Rob Wood

Franklin University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://fuse.franklin.edu/i4blog>



Part of the [Instructional Media Design Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wood, R. (2017). Looking Back, Looking Forward: Instructional Design Reflections. Retrieved from <https://fuse.franklin.edu/i4blog/47>

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by the International Institute for Innovative Instruction at FUSE (Franklin University Scholarly Exchange). It has been accepted for inclusion in The International Institute for Innovative Instruction Blog by an authorized administrator of FUSE (Franklin University Scholarly Exchange). For more information, please contact karen.caputo@franklin.edu.



Looking Back, Looking Forward: Instructional Design Reflections

October 17, 2017 | By Rob Wood
Instructional Design

Franklin University graduate student Amie Tope is preparing to enter the instructional design field in early 2018. Dr. Rob Wood has been practicing instructional design since 1988 and serves as a faculty member at Franklin University. Amie and Rob recently sat down for an informal, collegial discussion to talk about their perspectives. While Amie looks forward to stepping across the threshold and formally beginning her instructional design career, Rob is looking back over nearly 30 years as an instructional designer and considering what eventual retirement might look like.

Part I: Looking Back

Amie began the conversation by asking Rob to briefly describe the role of an instructional designer. This question elicited audible laughter from Rob, who realized that his protégé was very familiar with his penchant for telling long stories and relating multiple examples to illustrate his points. Nevertheless, Rob was able to keep his answer concise.

"The role of an instructional designer is to make learning accessible, meaningful, and relevant to learners," Rob replied. "For me, being an instructional designer includes everything from analysis to implementation and all the 'stuff' in between."

Amie then asked, **"In what ways have you seen the world of instructional design evolve since you have been in the field?"**

"The field has evolved a lot! Obviously, technology has changed quite a bit since I entered the field in 1988," remarked Rob. "Computer-Based Training (CBT) was just beginning to come on the scene then. In fact, we worked on IBM PCs that were running the MS-DOS 6.22 operating system. It was 1992 when the company where I worked upgraded our computers to Windows 3.1—the same year that Microsoft® released it.

"Another important evolution is how the basic systematic approach to the instructional design process became more refined, more thorough," Rob continued. "And, more focused research in the field in general helped everyone to do better work. For example, in 1995, the National Society for Performance and Instruction formalized the research-based Human Performance Technology (HPT) model; they even changed the name of the organization to the International Society for Performance Improvement. Both events were definite 'game changers' in terms of how we perceived the practice of instructional design within the much larger context of organizational and individual performance."

Looking ahead, Amie asked her professor, **“What are the greatest challenges an instructional designer will face?”**

Rob surmised, “Probably the most significant challenge is the project management aspect of instructional design—being able to focus on the context of the entire project and not just on the design of the instruction itself. Second, keeping up with where the world of instructional design is headed. There are so many voices in the field right now and not all of them agree, which is not surprising. I think we need to carefully “curate the sources” – that might be a good way to put it. It is a great challenge to sift through all of the voices, arguments, and research that are emerging ‘out there.’”

Amie again asked Rob to do some reflection, asking, **“What is one of the best experiences you have had in your ID career?”**

“Besides teaching? Well, I’ve had a lot of interesting projects,” said Rob. “One experience that really stands out was several years ago at Naval Headquarters in Washington D.C., where we set out to solve some problems that the order writers [personnel whose job is to send sailors to the correct duty stations] were having. Our solution was a combination of instructional simulations, computer-based training and testing (on a 12-inch video disc), and performance training.

“Each of the solutions were pretty high tech for the time, except for one,” Rob continued. “We designed a spiral-bound notebook printed on heavy card stock that listed the major procedures and computer entries for writing basic orders; we called it a ‘Brief Guide.’ It was the lowest-tech piece, yet it ended up being the order writers’ favorite tool. We later learned that they were still using the brief guide several years after the project ended. That was a great experience, not only in terms of designing some good solutions, but seeing the profound effect that even the simplest one had on the folks we were there to help.”

Amie concluded her questions by asking, **“What advice would you give someone who is on his or her journey to becoming an instructional designer?”**

“The same advice that someone gave me when I got started,” Rob replied. “Learn to tolerate change, ambiguity, and uncertainty and you’ll be a good instructional designer. That was the advice my first supervisor gave me almost 30 years ago. To that I would add, keep an open mind, and remember that instructional design, at its core, is about solving problems. If you can solve problems for learners, workplaces, and organizations, then you can say, ‘Mission accomplished.’”

Part II: Looking Forward

The professor then took his turn to ask his student some questions about her perspectives as a new designer preparing to enter the field. Naturally, Rob’s first question was a simple one. **“How did you first become interested in the field of instructional design?”**

Amie noted that she got her first taste of the profession toward the end of her undergraduate program. “It really started with my interest in teaching and education. I got some classroom experience as a substitute teacher. I loved the lesson planning process, but the classroom management—well, not so much! After a while, I realized that it wasn’t for me.

“I was trying to figure out what was next and someone told about the MS program in Instructional Design & Learning Technology (IDLT). I immediately saw the link to education and realized that what I really wanted was to be ‘behind the scenes’; I was particularly interested in learning how to design curriculum.”

“Now that you’ve been the field for about a year,” Rob then asked, **“What do you think of the work?”**

Amie responded unequivocally. “I love it! It’s definitely challenging and I’ve had a lot to learn. For example, fundamental theories like behaviorism, constructivism, and cognitive information processing was something I had not previously studied from a design perspective. After that, the various design principles, models, and theories I learned was often challenging but essential to the field. I also really like taking a systematic approach to problem solving and seeing how it can really make a difference in people’s lives. The design of the IDLT program itself has changed my life, and I am looking forward to changing others’ lives, especially students.”

That enthusiastic response led Rob to next inquire of Amie, **“What’s your favorite part of the instructional design process?”**

“Developing instruction with different technologies and experimenting with them! Using tools to do things like screen-casting, making infographics, creating activities, learning to use Learning Management Systems, and software like Adobe Captivate®, and using all of it to develop meaningful instruction,” replied Amie. “I also love being able to be creative and see all the pieces come together. I really like that aspect of design a lot.”

Rob then turned the tables on Amie and posed a very similar question to one she had asked him: **“What advice would you give to someone considering becoming an instructional designer?”**

Amie was ready with a quick answer. “Be willing and ready to take a problem, organize it, and make sense of it—and enjoy the process of problem solving! For sure, you have to like collaborating with other people. Exercising creativity is also very important, and remember, there are no right or wrong answers!”

Rob then asked Amie about what the future may hold for her. **“You’re not far from graduating with your Master of Science degree. What are your plans after you receive your diploma?”**

“Get a job!” Amie replied emphatically. “I’m still trying to decide which type of environment I want to work in—maybe higher education, the corporate world, etc. I guess the big question is, ‘Where will I fit best?’ My first job may be neither

higher education or corporate, but it'll still be good experience. Now that I think about it, maybe I'll do some consulting. That would be fun. In any case, I plan on staying up to date and continue researching. Who knows? Maybe I will even publish a research paper or an article!"

Epilogue: Mutual Reflections

Both Dr. Wood and Ms. Tope had the same final question for each other. **"Where do you see yourself in five years?"**

Amie is looking forward to establishing herself as an instructional design professional. "I want to be designing e-learning courses and thriving in my career—one that I love and that I'm still growing in. Definitely not in a dead-end boring job! I want to be involved in something fast paced, with opportunities for growth. Oh, and using the best technology tools since they are constantly evolving. And, I want to teach online, to be an adjunct faculty somewhere. That would be great."

Rob, meanwhile, has been there and done that, so to speak, so he is much less sure about where he'd like to find himself five years from now. "That's a good question. I'm still trying to figure out what I want to be when I grow up! After almost 30 years of designing and teaching, I'm looking at how I might want to stay involved in the field. After all, I'm approaching retirement-age (can it be?), so I have a lot to think about. I truly love teaching. Seeing the proverbial 'light bulb' go on watching someone grow professionally—there's nothing more rewarding. But I also love the design process, and I'm pretty good at it! So, the jury is still out, but I'm thinking about it, for certain."

One veteran instructional designer; one newcomer to the profession. One looking back; the other looking forward. Both, though, avid proponents of their chosen discipline.

About the Author

Rob Wood

Dr. Wood is faculty member at the International Institute for Innovative Instruction at Franklin University, where he specializes in instructional design.